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**SECOND SESSION – NINETH PARLIAMENT**

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**FIRST REPORT**

**OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY  
EDUCATION**

**ON**

**SCHOOLS OPENING IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT JUNE 2020**

**S.C. 6, 2020**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The Committee on Primary and Secondary Education resolved to conduct an inquiry into the country's preparedness to opening schools in light of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) which has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The Committee is aware that the school calendar has been adversely affected by the global pandemic which has killed millions of people across the globe. The nationwide lockdowns have affected the operation of schools given that by nature, schools comprise a large number of learners and teaching staff, which may be a high risk environment for the spread of the virus. Thus, in light of that, schools first term was closed about two weeks earlier than the actual date.

## **2.0 Objectives of the inquiry**

- i. To assessment schools' preparedness to open in light of COVID-19 pandemic,
- ii. To assess ZIMSEC's preparedness to offering the June and November 2020 National Examinations in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. To facilitate provision of safer environment in school in the context of Covid-19.

## **3.0 Methodology**

The Committee received oral evidence from Mrs. T. Thabela, the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. The Committee also held oral evidence sessions with Dr. Nembaware, the Acting Chief Executive Officer for ZIMSEC on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020 and lastly met Teachers Unions on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020. The objective of the meeting was to gather views on when schools are likely to open in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and measures being put in place to ensure the safety of pupils and teachers. The Teachers' Unions were led by Mr. Majongwe, Mr Nyawo and Mr Gundani representing the following Unions;

- Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ),
- Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (TUZ),
- Zimbabwe National Teachers Union (ZINATU),
- Zimbabwe National Educators Union (ZINEU),
- Zimbabwe Rural Teachers Union (ZRTU) ,
- Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (ARTUZ),
- Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA)
- National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASSH)
- National Association of Primary Heads, and
- National Association of School Inspectors.

## **4.0 Background**

The emergence of the novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID- 19) towards the end of the year 2019, brought about a huge transformation in terms of how people conduct their day to day businesses. It is no longer business as usual, given that the disease is highly infectious. Countries have responded differently to the global pandemic. National lockdowns were

imposed aimed at restricting the movement and gathering of people as measures to curtail the spread of the virus. The nationwide lockdowns have affected the operation of schools given that by nature, schools comprise a large number of learners and teaching staff, which may be a high risk environment for the spread of the virus. The school first term was closed two weeks earlier due to the pandemic. On 27 March 2020, His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Cde E.D. Mnangagwa, announced a National lockdown which began on 30 March 2020 for 21 days. When the 21 days lapsed, an additional two weeks were added, which eventually led to relaxation of measures to allow for the business community to operate except for the informal sector. This continued lockdown has also affected the opening of schools. Schools were programmed to open on 12 May 2020, but due to the lockdown, about 4,5 million learners and 166 000 teachers and supporting staff are still at home. This has implications on the whole education sector as this infringes on the rights and welfare of the learners and the teaching staff. In reviewing the lockdown measures, the President announced that schools may adopt a phased approach towards full operation starting with learners sitting for examinations in June and November 2020.

## **5.0 Oral evidence session with Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education**

The Permanent Secretary, Mrs Thabela, pointed out that the Ministry had submitted a proposed budget of \$21 billion to Treasury to meet its expenditure for 2020 in light of COVID- 19 pandemic. She highlighted that the Ministry had consulted widely its stakeholders and cooperating partners in discussing Zimbabwe's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Strategy for the Education Sector. During the discussions, Mrs Thabela indicated that the Ministry was guided by the following key pillars in their planning for reopening of schools;

### **5.1 Alternative Learning Approaches**

The Ministry is considering the short, medium and long term learning approaches for the learners to avoid regression during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Online learning has been identified as the best alternative during this era but internet connectivity challenges and data bundles pricing might militate against this mode of learning. The second alternative identified is Television and Radio Programming, which the Ministry is currently considering against accessibility. The third alternative is the provision of hard copy textbooks and modules to learners residing in communities where there is no internet, television and radio access. Thus, the Ministry in collaboration with printers is having more story books and modules printed, especially for the infant learners. The Ministry has also been working on adopting Open and Distance Learning as another alternative mode of learning, in particular for the Non-Formal Sector. It was highlighted that modules and materials for 7 subjects are being printed to assist during this pandemic.

### **5.2 The Five Phased Approach to Physical Schools Opening**

The Ministry firmly believes that COVID-19 is a disease that people have to learn to live with and, therefore, is planning ahead and working on strategies to put in place once the phased approach of opening schools begins. She highlighted that there is going to be a six month phased approach to school opening in line with the pronouncement made by His Excellency,

President, E.D. Mnangagwa. Mrs Thabela pointed out that schools will be opened gradually and in an informed manner so as not to expose the learners, teachers and the school community to COVID- 19. She noted that about 4 weeks were required to prepare and ensure that all the Covid 19 requirements are met before opening the schools starting with examination classes. The Ministry is envisaging a 5 phased approach as follows;

Phase 1 – Examination Classes for 2020; Grade 7, Form 4, Form 6

Phase 2 – Examination Classes for 2021; Grade 6, Form 3, Form 5

Phase 3 – Grade 3, 4 & 5, Form 1 & 2

Phase 4 – Grades 1 & 2

Phase 5 – ECD A & B.

The gradual opening of schools would assist the Ministry to adequately prepare and ensure that all the requirements are met while at the same time preparing parents to send their children to school.

### **5.3 Teacher Capacitation**

The Ministry is working on capacitating the teachers in preparation for the pandemic as learners return to school. The Secretary noted that there was urgent need to educate the teachers in light of the pandemic so that they also get used to alternative modes of learning. She noted also the urgent need for the teachers to adapt to the new forms of learning and standards required in a classroom once schools open. For example, how the teacher will have to receive children in class, monitoring the children, cleaning and sanitising the classroom and enforcing social distancing among others. Thus the Ministry is currently working with the Ministry of Health and Child Care in developing the guidelines for Covid 19 in schools. She highlighted that teacher capacitation was therefore urgent given that the phased approach for schools opening is set to start soon.

### **5.4 Teacher Recruitment**

In line with enforcing social distancing in classes, the Ministry noted the urgent need to recruit more teachers to take the newly created classes as a result of splitting bigger classes. She noted that Treasury has authorised recruitment of 2300 teachers in June with a target of 6000 by year end.

### **5.5 Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Disinfectants for Schools**

The Secretary bemoaned the huge budgetary requirement to be able to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to all its learners and staff once schools open. She stated that the phased approach would go a long way in ensuring that the Ministry meets these requirements gradually. She noted that at Phase One, about 667 476 learners and 66 748 staff would require masks at opening of schools. The total number of masks would reach 4 552 436 for learners and 290 382 for staff at Phase Five of schools opening. Each school is also expected to have at least 1 infrared thermometer for every 500 learners. In addition to that, the Ministry is also

considering procuring gloves and special gowns for the Health Coordinators at each school for handling of any suspected cases. Ms Thabela also noted that there was also need for all schools, especially those that have been used as Isolation Centres to be disinfected before schools opens.

## **5.6 School Infrastructure**

### **5.6.1 Classrooms**

The Secretary noted that there was a huge infrastructure gap in the education sector with about 5900 schools in Zimbabwe and a shortfall of over 200 schools.<sup>1</sup> She, therefore highlighted the challenge they already face as a Ministry of enforcing social distancing in line with WHO standards given the number of schools. She also noted the challenge of teacher pupil ratio which currently ranges between 1: 45 and 1:120 and the number of classes available. The Secretary highlighted that the Ministry was currently working on modalities to trim all classes into a small number of about 30 learners per class. She noted that the challenge of classroom shortages would be felt as they start to approach Phase Three, Four and Five, such that some learners will be learning in tents due to shortage of proper infrastructure. She also noted the need for rehabilitation of most school infrastructure to ensure that the school environment is conducive for learners during this pandemic.

### **5.6.2 Furniture**

Mrs. Thabela highlighted that the shortage of furniture in many schools will be another challenge the Ministry is seized with given that the learners must practice social distancing. Most schools have children sharing tables and desks, which is not ideal for the current environment of Covid 19 and, therefore, calls upon schools to ensure that proper furniture is procured for the learners.

### **5.6.3 Water and Sanitation**

Mrs. Thabela, acknowledged that most schools were struggling to provide clean and safe water, hence a number of school cannot meet the proper hygienic standards. The Ministry was, therefore, advocating for at least each school to have access to clean and safe water and functional ablution facilities. There is also need for hand washing liquid soaps, detergents, sanitisers and handwashing stations to enable frequent hand washing by the learners and teachers.

## **6.0 Oral evidence session with Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZIMSEC)**

ZIMSEC informed the Committee that the Council was prepared for the June 2020 examinations and tirelessly working towards the November examinations. However, it was noted that there were a lot of issues that needed attention by the parent Ministry before the June examinations are undertaken. ZIMSEC advised that it had received \$150 000 from Treasury, which enabled it to meet all examination expenses for both June and November 2020. ZIMSEC indicated that the Ministry viewed the June Examinations as a priority given that it is the last

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 Committee Report at the 2020 Pre-Budget Seminar

examinations based on the old curriculum hence affords learners their last chance. The Ministry is anticipating to be ready for June Examinations kicking off on 29 June 2020.

### **6.1 Examination Registration**

Dr Nembaware acknowledged that Covid 19 had a significant impact on examination registration for the June and November sittings by learners. This was exacerbated by the national lockdown which began on 30 March 2020, restricting the movement of people, hence impacting on registration processes. However, in order to facilitate registration by learners, ZIMSEC opened an online registration platform which enabled other candidates to register during the lockdown. However, he noted that for June registration, very few learners were affected by the lockdown given that in the June 2019 examinations, 5900 students sat for the examinations and 2020 about 5700 students had registered to date. However, ZIMSEC noted a reduction in candidates registered for O' level by almost 75000 students and attributed the decline to COVID-19 disturbances and examination fee hikes. He pointed out that in order not to disadvantage the candidates, another window period will be opened to facilitate registration for those who failed to register.

### **6.2 Examination Fees**

Dr. Nembaware informed the Committee that ZIMSEC was facing challenges with respect to receiving payment of examination fees. It was noted that after the announcement by the Ministry to revert back to the 2015 fees structure, a number of candidates paid and later on when the new fees were announced, most candidates were failing to pay top ups. A number of centres have also failed to remit money collected for examination fees. Lastly, he noted that a number of private candidates benefited from the government subsidy against the regulation hence ZIMSEC will be requesting top ups.

### **6.3 Examination Centres**

It was highlighted that for November 2020 examinations, there were about 5290 centres catering for about 300 000 registered candidates for Grade 7, 2244 centres for 315 000 candidates for Ordinary level and 852 centres catering for 53000 registered candidates for Advanced level. For the June examinations, ZIMSEC had 821 registered centres catering for 60 910 candidates and 175 centres catering for 5761 candidates. ZIMSEC noted that they were guided by the parent Ministry in terms of registering schools as examination centres and therefore have no control over the relaxation of such standards given the global pandemic. ZIMSEC only requires that the Centre be manned by qualified personnel, provide adequate furniture and be easily accessible to candidates. Therefore, it was noted that a number of satellite schools might be failing to meet the MoPSE requirements to be registered as examination centres.

### **6.4 Provision of Personal Protective Equipment**

ZIMSEC has been observing the demands of Statutory Instrument 9 of 2020 during the production of question papers and will do the same during deployment. These demands include provision of protective clothing, sanitizing, disinfection of offices and materials including

vehicles that will be used during deployment of question papers, among others. However, Dr. Nembaware emphasized that ZIMSEC's responsibility ends with the deployment of examination materials, and other processes fall within the ambit of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The Ministry will be expected to disinfect classrooms, provide protective clothing and adherence to regulations such as observing social distancing among others.

## **7.0 Oral evidence session with Teachers Unions**

The representatives from the teachers' unions (Mr. Nyawo and Mr. Majongwe) spoke with one voice, calling upon the Government to put in place adequate standards required by the WHO to facilitate the physical opening of schools. The Unions welcomed the suggestion by the Government to open schools because failure to open also has socio-economic implications on the economy. The Unions were clear that the Government should desist from opening schools hurriedly without putting in place all safety measures. The following sentiments were raised which the Government must commit to and address;

- 7.1 Establishment of a Schools Opening Taskforce comprising of the teachers' unions, health and education officials to undertake a COVID - 19 risk assessment in school. The Taskforce must cascade down to the provinces and at the school level to spearhead the whole processes.
- 7.2 Provision of rapid testing kits to all schools for testing of both learners and teachers before schools open for business and also ensuring regular testing. The unions doubted the capacity of the Government to provide such an environment at the time of inquiry given that about 34000 tests have been conducted nationwide. The Unions feel that Government should do more testing than at the present moment.
- 7.3 More teachers should be recruited to enable schools to practice social distancing by reducing bigger classes to smaller numbers of about 20 to 30 children. The current provision to recruit 6000 teachers was regarded as inadequate. In addition, teachers should be paid a risk allowance given that they are the frontline workers in the education sector. Many teachers have underlying medical conditions that require adequate standards to be put in place before schools opens to guarantee their safety. They requested for the government to provide them with adequate Personal Protective gear that will enable them to provide their teaching services comfortably. The Unions suggested that a teacher be allocated at least one face shield that s/he could use to teach rather than a face mask as is the case in South Africa.
- 7.4 The Unions recommended the postponement of June examinations until such a time as it was convenient. June examinations required a lot of logistical arrangement given that some of the candidates travel from different places to sit for the examinations. Since the national lockdown was imposed on 30 March, transport has been a nightmare and yet it has an impact on whether the learners are able to reach the examination centres on time. In addition, Unions questioned the capacity of the Ministry to test all the candidates and the facilitators before entering the examination room.
- 7.5 Teachers' representatives also suggested that there should be rigorous fumigation of schools, especially those that have been used as isolation centres to ensure safety of the

school community. The Unions questioned the capacity of teachers in handling COVID-19 cases once they are detected.

- 7.6 Mr. Gundani from ZIMTA informed the Committee that the Government should develop an adequate budget that will meet all the requirements by the Ministry, such as teacher remuneration, risk allowance, recruitment of more teachers to ensure a reasonable teacher – pupil ratio and provision of adequate PPE, among others. The Government should prioritise investing in school infrastructure, such as water and sanitation, classrooms, furniture and internet connectivity, among others. The Government should also prioritise social safety nets such as reviving the school feeding programme once schools open, given that the pandemic has affected the livelihoods of many people, especially, the informal sector.
- 7.7 The Government must also prioritise social safety nets such as the school feeding programme and adequately fund BEAM once schools open, given that the pandemic has affected the livelihoods of many people, especially, the informal sector.

## **8.0 Committee Observations**

The Committee observed that there are diverging views from the Ministry and the Teachers' Unions as to the opening of schools. Whilst the Ministry is ready and planning towards opening schools from end of June, the Unions have put forward a whole list of conditions that the Government must meet to enable for the teachers to go back to work. The Committee also noted that while ZIMSEC is ready for the June and November examinations, this should not be the driving factor for opening of schools. Thus, the Committee deliberated on the matters and made the following observations;

- 8.1 That it is a fallacy that the Government can raise the \$21 billion required by the Ministry to meet its obligations during this COVID- 19 pandemic. In light of this challenge, the Government and stakeholders should develop a COVID- 19 Response Strategy that will assist in mobilising resources. The Committee is of the view that schools should only open once the basic WHO requirements and the Ministry of Health and Child Care guidelines are met.
- 8.2 That the June examinations remains important in the education sector given that it is the last of its kind under the old curriculum. In that context, the Committee has also noted that the corona virus is believed to be more active in the winter season, hence it is too risky for the learners to sit for the examinations.
- 8.3 That the country continues to suffer from legacy issues of poor and insufficient school infrastructure which militates against observing the WHO standards, such as water and sanitation, classrooms and furniture, among others.
- 8.4 That failure by Government to review conditions of service for the teachers might militate against efforts being put in place to facilitate schools opening, given that their salaries have been eroded by inflation.
- 8.5 That some examination centres are not within reach of many candidates, especially in rural areas where learners have to travel long distances or camp in lodges to be able to sit for their examinations. The Committee is of the view that the country is not operating



under a normal environment, hence the need to consider reviewing the standards and allow for opening of other centres.

## **9.0 Committee Recommendations**

- 9.1 Comprehensive school opening should only be done when the Government meets all the basic requirements stipulated by the WHO guidelines such as access to clean and safe water at each school, distribution of PPE to all teachers and learners and ensuring social distancing in classrooms, among others.
- 9.2 Treasury should therefore prioritise the release of **\$3 605 613 146.00** immediately required by the Ministry to enable it to effectively plan for the physical opening of schools, beginning with Phase 1.
- 9.3 In the meantime, the Government should expedite the facilitation of radio and television programming and online learning by creating the enabling environment by end of June 2020. The Committee is suggesting that the Ministry collaborates with the Ministry of ICT in licencing companies that can provide online learning at affordable prices while the Governments earns revenue from that to ensure safe eLearning.
- 9.4 June Examinations should be postponed to summer (September/October) of 2020 to give the candidates ample time to prepare academically, psychologically and emotionally.
- 9.5 There should be uniformity in enforcement of opening all schools, regardless of whether it is private, public or trust schools. No school shall be given special treatment during this era.
- 9.6 The Ministry should relax the requirement for accreditation of schools to be examination centres to ensure that they are easily accessible to the candidates. The Committee is proposing that the Ministry considers adopting the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) Framework in running examinations using some of the polling stations as examination centres.
- 9.7 The recruitment of teachers should be prioritised as a strategy to ensure that the teacher pupil ratio in the classroom of 1:20 is achieved.

## **10.0 Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the COVID-19 pandemic demands that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should think outside the box. Opening of schools should only progress after the Government meets all the basic requirements stipulated by the WHO guidelines including providing adequate PPE for both pupils and teachers among others.

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## **Annexures**

1. Statement from Teachers' Union (PTUZ and Others) presented to the Committee on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. (Page 10)
2. Submission from the Association of Independent Colleges in Zimbabwe (Page 12).
3. Statement from ZIMTA presented to the Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2020.

**26 MAY 2020**

**JOINT STATEMENT BY TEACHERS' UNIONS IN ZIMBABWE ON THE REOPENING OF SCHOOLS AND STATE OF PREPAREDNESS.**

- Appreciating the spirit of engagement between government and teacher unions as evidenced by the meeting held on the 20th of May 2020;
- Determined to have a safe teaching and learning environment;
- Concerned with the increasing number of covid19 cases in our country;
- Aware of some reckless bravery being exhibited by some ill-informed sections of society bent on opening schools for expediency and primitive accumulation of wealth and;
- Desiring to open learning institutions as soon as it is practicable,

We, the undersigned Teacher Unions in Zimbabwe, now therefore, urge the Government of Zimbabwe to:

1. Desist from an impulse opening of schools without ensuring that it is very safe to do so,
2. Open churches, bars and weddings first before schools to assess the contagious effect of gatherings of 50 plus people,
3. Ensure that the Coronavirus epidemic is totally under control before taking the steps of opening of schools.
4. Ensure the verifiable fumigation of all schools before they open as well as at regular intervals thereafter. Schools that are currently used as quarantine zones should go through rigorous fumigation and confirmed safe by competent personnel in the Ministry of Health and Childcare,
5. Ensure the rapid testing of all pupils and teachers before schools open for business and provision of the same at regular intervals,
6. Pay an acceptable risk allowance to teachers as in essence they are frontline workers in the education system.
7. Capacitate teachers in identifying and handling covid-19 in case of infections or reinfections in schools,
8. Postpone ZIMSEC June examinations until it's verifiably safer to write them;
9. Consider and assess the impact of returnees from high risk countries flocking back at the moment, both through official and illegal means
10. Enable the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to establish a task force comprising teacher unions, health and education officials to carry out covid19 risk assessment in schools,
11. Take cognisance of the effects of the cold season we are entering as it quickens infection rates of this type of epidemic,
12. Reduce teacher-pupil ratio to 1:20 through employing more teachers urgently,

13. Supply PPEs, test kits, thermometers and sanitizers to all 10 000 schools. These should be adequate enough for 4.6 million students, 136 000 teachers, and ancillary staff,
14. Ensure uninterrupted provision of safe running water for all schools,
15. Ensure through the line Ministry that every pupil has at least 3 washable and safe masks,
16. Stop the use of teaching and learning facilities for political gatherings or any unnecessary congregations in order to minimize the risk of infection of teachers, ancillary staff and learners,
17. Test samples of masks and sanitisers produced for use by teachers and learners to ascertain if they meet the standard requirements as stipulated by WHO or the Ministry of Health and Childcare.
18. Pay teachers salaries that resonate with their 2018 salaries of US\$520 or its inter-bank rate equivalent in order to restore salaries' purchasing power parity that has been eroded by conversion to local currency, together with the attendant inflation,
19. Provide a workable plan for teachers with pre-existing medical conditions in order to reduce or eliminate their possible exposure to Covid19.

As teacher unions we reiterate our preparedness to guard our members and working areas jealously against the seasons of folly reckless courage and outright ignorance.

We will not accept anything less than the reopening of schools under a safe and healthy environment.

We are indeed arbiters of a nation's destiny whose health and safety must be prioritised. As such, we will not be frog-marched into opening schools before the country has met the conditions set by WHO.

Any premature opening of schools without conditionalities echoed by WHO would be suicidal and genocidal.

As such, we trust and hope the government, let alone the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, will put reason before choler and avoid unnecessary antagonisation of teachers, pupils and even parents.

**Jointly signed by**

**ARTUZ - Chere R. (0775643192)**

**PTUZ - Zunde L. (0772198868)**

**TUZ - Kanyongo G. (0775914024)**

**ZDTU - Mushipe G. k. (0772918732)**

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**ZINEU - Chinosengwa C. (0715815347)**

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The Chairperson: Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education  
Honourable Ms. Priscila Mishairambwi Mushonga  
Parliament of Zimbabwe  
3<sup>rd</sup> Street/khame Nkrumah  
Harare

**RE: Opening of Examination classes**

We write with reference to the above.

**Association of Independent colleges In Zimbabwe**

We are an Association of Independent Colleges in Zimbabwe. We are made up of over five hundred (500) independent colleges. The colleges collectively employ over ten thousand (10 000) people and they teach over one hundred thousand students. Our members provide tuition for both the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council and Cambridge examining boards. The Association is made up of ten administrative provinces in the country. Under the provinces are districts. The Association is headed by a national executive drawn from the provincial chairpersons.

**Request to be heard**

We note that as the Parliamentary portfolio committee in charge of education, you have had the chance to hear the views of other stakeholders including the ministry and the trade unions representing government teachers. We hereby request for an opportunity to be heard by the committee.

**Opening of Examination Classes**

His Excellency, President Emmerson Munangagwa gave a directive that examination classes be allowed to open two weeks ago. Our members went into overdrive to prepare for the opening under the new normal regulations of proper social distancing. Despite the fact that we have not had income for two full months, we went on to secure funding to ensure suitable furniture and chemicals were acquired. Some of our members even went on to lease additional space. Sadly, two weeks later, the ministry has not given direction as to when the examination classes can start. Meanwhile, every day that goes by makes independent colleges poorer as we continue to accrue salaries and many other fixed costs such as rentals and rates. We have no access to any subsidy yet we are not allowed to operate. The ministry has not even moved around our colleges to make inspections to check on the state of preparedness amongst our members. In any case no guidelines were ever given by the ministry on the requirements for re-opening of schools outside general pronouncements. The ministry seems to be only focusing on public schools for which it is not ready. We hereby implore the ministry to immediately open examination classes since the ministry went on to give the June examination dates yet keeps schools closed. This, to us, appears illogical. The ministry must also remember that our students paid full examination fees hence they need to be adequately prepared by ourselves for the examinations as they stand to get no benefit in terms of subsidy in examination fees.

It has to be appreciated that private colleges are on the brink of permanent closure and possible extinction due to the weight of debts arising from continued accrual of liabilities and non-servicing of mortgage loans. Should this happen, over one hundred thousand (100 000) students under both Zimsec and Cambridge examination boards may not easily be absorbed by the formal system should private colleges be allowed to closed down. Almost all informal students in the country access tuition from private colleges. These will suffer irreparable damage should the colleges close down. Please note that the sector has a shortage of over two thousand five hundred schools. Our belief as an association is that this pandemic will be with us for many years to come and what we have to do as a nation is to learn how to live with it like we successfully did with HIV than closing institutions like schools

### **Government Teachers' Unions**

We note that there is a conflict between the above unions and the employer of their members. In our view, their differences are a private employer- employee dispute which should not hold the whole education sector at ransom. Whilst they haggle for their acceptable position, we request that private schools and private colleges be allowed to open as workers in these institutions are not represented by the above unions.

May we further request that when the ministry makes stakeholder consultation, we be included as well as we represent an important constituency.

### **Unregistered schools**

We note that local authorities across the country are demolishing illegal structures and illegal vending sites. We also note that *Mishikashika* mode of transport is being banned. This is all being done to enable government to manage Covid 19. We would like to understand what the ministry is going to do about illegal schools that litter our residential areas across the country. It is sad that such *Mishikashika schools* have been allowed to freely operate in the field of education. The illegal education vending sites are operating freely with impunity with the tacit approval of the ministry. What action will be taken to protect children in these schools under Covid 19. These are places that ministry officials never visit for inspections despite the children being taught falling under the ministry. The ministry has traditionally regulated the operations of registered schools but no education official throughout the whole country has ever attempted to visit any of these schools to see if there any standards being followed.

We wonder if the ministry is aware that any day that schools remain closed enriches the illegal schools as some are currently operating. In fact, most of them are making brisk business as they are overwhelmed by demand right as formal schools are closed.

The committee must take note of the fact that these unregistered schools, will be the new Covid 19 hotspots as they operate from homes and there is bound to be overcrowding because they are unable to create additional space. Besides, they risk no visits from state officials in the ministry of education nor the ministry of health.

### **Other Issues**

We also request that the committee address the following issues on our behalf.

- a) Annual Guarantee Fund

Private colleges are required to pay huge sums of money in annual guarantee funds which formal schools are not required to pay even though we meet all our operating expenses on our own.

b) Zimsec annual subscription fees

Private colleges are also required to pay huge sums of money in Zimsec annual subscription fees which other education players under the same ministry are not compelled to pay. If it is a fund-raising activity, then Zimsec should levy every candidate countrywide and not to place additional burdens on private colleges.

c) Examination subsidies

Students who are writing examinations under private colleges were not covered by the government subsidy despite the fact that they are already paying higher school fees in in private colleges. Why should the government discriminate it's on students. All students writing examinations in the country do so under the ministry of education. Are formal students more Zimbabwean than those in private colleges?

d) Donations into schools

We sadly note that when organisations like UNICEF donate books into schools, private colleges are always left out. Please note that it is the students who are punished and not the colleges. This also includes donor funded training.

e) Step child attention

The impression we get from the ministry's actions is that we are a huge inconvenience to them and not a partner in education. We feel like we always get step child attention.

We therefore request that before schools are opened, a decision be made about unregistered schools.

Yours Sincerely

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